



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

August 23, 2005

News Release

ICE, CBP JOINT EFFORTS RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT COCAINE SEIZURES, ARRESTS THIS WEEKEND IN SOUTH TEXAS

Hundreds kilos of cocaine seized during a 72-hour period

BROWNSVILLE, Texas — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers working together at and between South Texas ports of entry this weekend seized \$13 million in cocaine, and arrested seven people on drug-smuggling charges.

During a 72-hour period ending midnight Sunday, Homeland Security officers seized 809 pounds of cocaine at South Texas ports of entry in six separate enforcement actions, including a \$10 million load in Brownsville and three significant seizures at the Laredo Port of Entry.

The highest valued seizure occurred Friday at Veteran's International Bridge in Brownsville. CBP Officers referred a 1992 International tractor carrying an empty refrigerated trailer for a secondary examination.

A non-intrusive imaging system scan revealed cocaine bundles in the front wall of the trailer. ICE agents initiated an investigation that led to the arrest of two individuals near Weslaco: Juan Jose Maldonado Palomares, 34, a Mexican national from Matamoros, and Juan Hector Gonzalez, 31, a U.S. citizen from Mission. ICE agents also seized another tractor and a 2005 Dodge Ram pickup. The 629 pounds of seized cocaine have an estimated street value of \$10 million. Maldonado Palomares and Gonzalez went before a federal magistrate in Brownsville yesterday.

CBP officers at the Laredo Port of Entry also seized three loads of cocaine totaling 131 pounds. All three loads were discovered during inspections of passenger vehicles, including 60 pounds in a 2000 Ford Lobo, 44 pounds in a 2001 Ford Windstar, and 27 pounds in a 1999 Ford Explorer. The drivers in each incident were arrested by ICE agents on federal drug charges and made their initial appearances in federal court yesterday.

“The volume of seizures and arrests demonstrate the effectiveness of Homeland Security’s combined resources. ICE and CBP are working hand-in-hand to identify, investigate and arrest those responsible for drug trafficking,” said Alonzo Peña, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in San Antonio. “ICE will continue to work with our fellow homeland security agencies to dismantle these criminal organizations attempting to smuggle drugs that pose a danger to our communities.”

Gurdit Dhillon, CBP director of field operations, Laredo, applauded the seizures. “Our officers have distinguished themselves this weekend by taking down six significant cocaine loads valued at \$13 million,” Dhillon said. “Their coordination with their law enforcement partners in ICE also is commendable.”

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.